Program Overview

The Design Graduate Program is a multi-disciplinary program focusing on the relationships between humans and the designed environment. The program consists of four formal tracks: Apparel Studies, Graphic Design, Housing Studies, and Interior Design. There are 33 graduate faculty, and 73 graduate students. The program offers Master of Arts (Plan A, Plan B), Master of Science (Plan A, Plan B), Master of Fine Arts (Graphic Design Track only), and Doctor of Philosophy degrees. Masters students develop design and research skills for positions in education, business, and industry. M.F.A. and Ph.D. students pursue terminal degrees in preparation for careers in academia, design, government, consulting, and non-profit organizations.

Faculty scholarly interests in the program are track-specific and interdisciplinary. Apparel Studies faculty and student interests lie in the areas of material culture, historic trends, and psychological and social behaviors related to dress; theories and processes used in developing wearable soft goods; understanding and conducting research on individuals, groups, organizations, and the processes they use to select, secure, use, and dispose of apparel products. In Graphic Design, faculty and students explore multicultural communication, visual representation of information, human interaction with designed objects, social and cultural implications of design, color systems and perception, design history, and design education. Faculty and students in the Housing Studies track focus on theoretical and practical knowledge in the field, emphasizing human needs and behavior, policy and community development, analysis of designed environments, and housing for specific populations. In Interior Design, the focus is on theory, research, and specialized practice components of design as applied to people’s health, safety, and welfare in the interior environment, including culture, sustainability, and issues facing design education. Across the Design Graduate Program students and faculty have access to research objects in the Goldstein Museum of Design and several venues to exhibit scholarly and creative production.

Process to Identify Program Goals and Outcomes

The process was a collaboration of the Design Graduate Program Committee composed of a faculty representative from each track, a doctoral student, and the Director of Graduate Studies. They reviewed student feedback collected spring 2014 through the Graduate Review and Improvement Process (GRIP). The GRIP report was reviewed and discussed with faculty at the September Design Graduate Program Faculty meeting. The Director of Graduate Studies assembled information into a draft report of program learning goals and outcomes. The draft report was discussed with faculty at the Design Graduate Program meeting on October 1 and with graduate students on November 6. Feedback was incorporated into the plan. The final draft was discussed by the Design Graduate Program faculty on November 7, 2014.
Graduate Learning Outcomes

Faculty and graduate students recognized the following learning outcomes as critical common goals across the tracks: 1) communication skills, including team work, leadership, and project management; 2) skills in basic research, applied research, and creative production. Research skills include developing a philosophical orientation, methods, an understanding of classic and emerging theories in a discipline as well as applying, developing, and testing theories to interpret research and design and develop products; and, 3) professional development, including students’ discovery and exploration of interests that transform their personal and professional futures.

The findings in the GRIP report suggest students in the Design Graduate Program want more mentoring on building professional networks and preparing to enter the job market. Faculty members are exploring methods and activities that clearly support students’ professional development, encourage students to articulate their skills, and prepare for the job market. Graduate students also valued and wanted more opportunities for cross-disciplinary work; cross-disciplinary courses and projects are key components of the department strategic plan.

Assessment

Measureable outcomes for goals include written and oral examinations, and rigorous review and defense of Master and MFA projects, Master theses and doctoral dissertations. The program plans to begin documenting dissemination such as students’ theses, presentations, publications, and exhibitions as well as public engagement activities and cross-disciplinary discovery and learning. Ninety-three percent of the students completing degrees in the Design Graduate Program find positions related to their graduate degree. The Design Graduate Program will continue to annually survey students based on the questions developed by students for the GRIP report. Subsequent surveys will focus on identified goals and measure the influence of mentoring and activities designed to meet student learning outcomes.

Summary

Faculty in the Design Graduate Program also teach and administer the undergraduate programs in Design, Housing, and Apparel. Recognizing that graduate learning outcomes are more individualized than undergraduate learning outcomes, graduate students are expected to build on their undergraduate education. In a program as broad as the Design Graduate Program, students are responsible for defining personal goals; they are expected to build mentoring relationships, a program of study, and creative production and research agendas to support personal goals. Faculty monitor and support student progress. In response to comments in the GRIP survey and discussion about this report, faculty are intentionally discussing and planning to refine their mentoring skills. Faculty are also developing workshops and activities that support students in developing skills and practice talking about their work, networks, and prepare to secure positions and manage careers.